

Doctors claim 'nasty weapon' tested in Gaza

OSLO

Israel is testing a new "extremely nasty" type of weapon in Gaza, according to two doctors returning home to Norway after spending 10 days working at a hospital in the war-ravaged Palestinian territory.

"There's a strong suspicion that Gaza is being used as a test laboratory for new weapons," Dr Mads Gilbert said, commenting on the kinds of injuries he said he and colleague Dr Erik Fosse had seen while working at Shifa Hospital in Gaza.

The two doctors, who were sent into the war zone by the pro-Palestinian aid organisation NORWAC on December 31, said they had seen clear signs that Dense Inert Metal Explosives, an experimental kind of explosive, were being used in Gaza.

"This is a new generation of very powerful small explosives that detonates with an extreme power and dissipates its power within a range of 5-10m," Dr Gilbert said.

"We have not seen the casualties affected directly by the bomb because they are normally torn to pieces and do not survive, but we have seen a number of very brutal amputations . . . without shrapnel injuries, which we strongly suspect must have been caused by the DIME weapons."

DIME weapons, which combine explosives with tungsten, are designed to have a limited blast radius to reduce collateral damage.

Israeli troops determined to continue the fight

TEL AVIV

As Israeli troops battled in the streets of the Gaza Strip, soldiers returning from the offensive said the battle to defeat Hamas should continue.

At a muster point beyond the Gaza border, troops grabbed some rest. But confronting fighters of the Islamic faction remained on their minds.

"Hamas are everywhere inside," a soldier named Micky said. "People don't realise when there is a photo-

graph of a man carrying his dead son, that man has most likely been firing rockets out of Gaza for eight years."

Israel deployed five brigades of elite and regular soldiers to Gaza and sent in reservists for the first time on Sunday. The fresh forces will enter a wasteland as a result of the heavy damage inflicted on Gaza's infrastructure.

"There is nothing there," Micky said. "Most buildings are shelled."

Many of the soldiers were hoping to rescue a colleague, Gilad Shalit, who

was kidnapped by Hamas in 2006 and is thought to be held in Rafah.

"Hamas took Gilad hostage two years ago and Hamas have been firing rockets at us continuously," Olaf, 21, said. "Yet the moment we Israelis react, the whole world accuses us of being disproportional."

Some of the soldiers have borne the brunt of Hamas rocket attacks in their civilian lives.

"They stop me living where I want to live," a sergeant nicknamed Peppy

said. "My family had to move twice because of them."

While the regular forces are eager to return to the battle, some of the reservists are showing signs of fatigue.

Nadav, a 19-year-old, spoke in a flat voice about his reluctance to return to Gaza. "What do you expect," he said. "It is not nice having a 12-year-old boy shooting at you."

As gunfire grew louder, Peppy rounded up his team. "Come on. Let's fight for our country."



Foot patrol: Israeli soldiers head towards the northern Gaza Strip on Monday. Reservists have been added to the troops fighting across the border. Picture: Reuters